Church unity

DRAFT AGENDA

FOR THE

WORLD CONFERENCE ON FAITH AND ORDER

Prepared by the Continuation Committee at Stockholm, August 15 to 18, 1925.

Published for
the Continuation Committee by the Secretariat,
P. O. Box 226, Boston, Mass., U.S.A.

September, 1925.

VH12
V78
RF
am 41
c99c 1

WH12
W78
RF
Pam
Cage

Copies of this pamphlet and of other publications relating to the World Conference on Faith and Order may be had free on application to the Secretariat, P. O. Box 226, Boston, Mass., U. S. A.

Contributions for the expenses of the work are greatly needed. They may be sent to the United States Trust Company, 45 Wall Street, New York City, to the Rev. Ernest Jauncey, M.A., "Langdale," Telegraph Road, Heswall, Birkenhead, England, or to Mr. C. R. Walsh, Diocesan Rectory, George Street, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia.

EXTRACTS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE CONTINUATION COMMITTEE

Stockholm, August 15 to 18, 1925.

Voted:

That the discussions at the Conference should take the form of speaking to definite propositions.

That whereas in the first invitation to the Conference it was stated that the Conference would be "without power to legislate or adopt resolutions," this phrase is not to be interpreted to exclude the adoption of statements which would officially record the results which may be reached by the Conference whether in the way of agreement or of admission of differences.

That a definite Agenda for the World Conference should be prepared by the Continuation Committee and, when prepared, should be circulated by it to the various Churches and Commissions for their information.

That the Agenda for the World Conference should be circulated by the Continuation Committee as the basis for preliminary discussion by local conferences, and this discussion should be the main preparatory work of the next two years. The results of such discussions should be communicated to the Secretariat, to be forwarded by the Secretariat to the Subjects Committee for information and action; and such communications should be received by the Secretariat not later than August 1, 1926.

That the Agenda for the World Conference should be so framed as to give a comprehensive outline, in a logical order, of the business with which the Conference ought eventually to deal.

That the representatives of the Churches at the World Conference shall have no power to bind the Churches by word or vote. The decisions of the Conference, if it reaches any decisions, can bind no Church represented without its subsequent and deliberate assent, but will be referred to all the Churches for their unfettered consideration.

That the Agenda of the World Conference should conclude with provisions for the continuation of its work.

NOTES CONCERNING THE AGENDA.

The difference between Resolutions and Propositions is as follows: Resolutions are intended to be put to the vote of the Conference; Propositions are not intended to be put to the vote.

The Propositions contain in brief sentences some of the most important results of the work of the groups which have considered the series of questions circulated by the Continuation Committee, and of other joint conferences between members of different churches recently held.

The purpose of the Propositions is that the Conference should start from results which other similar conferences have reached. If the Conference does not agree with those results, this will become obvious in the discussions. The Conference will in any case frame its own statements on each subject or decide to make no statement. (See the proposed special Standing Orders.)

Thus, the object of the Continuation Committee in placing these Propositions on the Agenda is not to suggest conclusions to the Conference, but to connect its deliberations with the discussions on Church unity which will have preceded it.

It is recognised that there are other subjects which might be put before the Conference, but those which have been placed on the Agenda are believed to be the subjects which must first be considered before any further progress can be made.

DRAFT AGENDA FOR THE WORLD CONFERENCE ON FAITH AND ORDER.

Preamble

We, the members of the World Conference on Faith and Order, being members of

(*names of Churches*) · , sent to the Conference by authority of those Churches, but not given any commission to speak officially for the Churches nor any power to bind them by any vote, together with other Christian men and women coöpted or appointed (*other methods of appointment to be named*), and being met in the name of God at

(*place*) on (*date*) , and recognising both the large measure of agreement that exists amongst us concerning the things of God and the great loss and hindrance that our divisions cause to His Church, and commending our work to Him in the confidence that it is His Spirit who has put it into the heart of many in all parts of the world to desire a greater unity in Christendom, proceed to the consideration of the Agenda prepared for the Conference by the Continuation Committee.

Subject I. The Call to Unity.

Resolution.

That this Conference calls the Christian world to increased and more definite efforts for a greater unity of Christendom and for a deeper penitence with regard to the disunion of the Churches, and records its conviction that nothing but the most heart-stirring motives are adequate to inspire and carry through such efforts. Accordingly the Conference pleads with every Christian to remember (*a*) the New Testament teaching, that the Church should reflect the unity of God; (*b*) the impulse of the Holy Spirit within the Church and in their own hearts, making towards unity; (*c*) the purpose of the Lord, that through His Church the non-Christian world should be converted and all human society purified and inspired, a purpose which cannot be fulfilled but by a united Church; and (*d*) the strength and violence of the antagonistic forces of our day, which cannot be met but by a united Church.

Subject II. The Nature of the Church.

(*Note.* This subject is placed first because an advance toward agreement concerning the nature of the Church is the first necessity in the movement toward unity.)

Propositions.

A. The Church is essentially the body of Christ, and the members thereof are those called by Him into the Fellowship of His Spirit.

B. This body of Christ consists of those who have been or are being redeemed by Christ and sanctified by the Spirit, and respond by faith to the mercy of God, and by faith pursue His purposes and obtain His promises under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

C. The divine purpose of the Church is the carrying on of Christ's work as Saviour of the world, Who is reconciling man to God, extending God's sovereignty over the wills of men, imparting to them His holiness, and uniting them in love.

D. It was also part of God's design for his Church that it should have an appropriate form and recognisable existence as the body of Christ and as a fellowship of Word and Sacraments: —

(1) Its members were to be bound together by their Faith in God as revealed and incarnate in Christ, which they not only have each one in his heart toward God, but profess in common as a body and confess before men.

(2) Its members were to be incorporated in the body by a solemn act of God performed through the Church, the Sacrament of Baptism.

(3) Its members were to be continually filled anew with the life of the Lord through the Sacrament of His body and blood, and in the same Sacrament to offer to God the common devotion of the whole body.

(4) Its members were to be continually nourished and enlightened by the Spirit, not only speaking silently to the heart of each, but instructing the whole body through the Word written in the Holy Scriptures and through the Word preached, and binding it together by the common inheritance of known truth.

(5) The body was to be directed and united by the authority and leadership of a ministry given by Christ to the Church and recognised and respected by all its members.

Subjects III–VI concern the nearer approach to unity on certain cardinal points.

Subject III. The Church's Common Confession of Faith in God.

Propositions.

A. With a view to greater unity, it is essential that the now separated parts of the Church should unite in an explicit declaration of their fundamental beliefs.

B. The now separated Churches need to come to an agreement with regard to the position which the reunited Church should take up concerning the most ancient statements of the Church's Faith, namely the creeds commonly called the Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed.

C. The following should be the position of the reunited Church towards the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds:

(1) It professes its belief in the truths set forth in these creeds.

(2) It leaves the times and manners of the use of those creeds to the decision of local Churches.

(3) While firmly adhering to the substance of those creeds, it recognises the

possibility that the Holy Spirit may enable the Church, in its recovered unity, to make other statements of the truths contained in the revelation of God through Christ according to the needs of future times.

Subject IV. The Church's Ministry.

(1) Necessity of a universally recognised ministry.

Proposition.

It is necessary to the greater unity of the Church that the whole Church should possess a universally recognised ministry.

(2) Proposals for securing a universally recognised ministry.

(In conferences between episcopal and non-episcopal communions in England, India and Australia, it has been generally agreed that, owing to its historic position in the Churches of Christendom, the episcopate must have a place in the reunited Church, and might be combined with the essential elements of the presbyteral and the congregational polity. The three following propositions rest on this basis.)

Propositions.

A. The episcopate of the reunited Church should be a constitutional and representative episcopate, side by side with which the councils of the Presbyters and the congregations of the Faithful should have their constitutional places.

B. The rule of the reunited Church should be that every ordination must be by a Bishop, and every consecration by at least three

Bishops. The Presbyters present at the ordination of a Presbyter should join with the Bishop in the laying on of hands.

C. The reunited Church, in adopting episcopal ordination as its rule, would not ground its adoption of the rule on any particular theory of the origin or character of episcopal ordination, nor demand as necessary the teaching or acceptance of any such theory.

(It is desired to include at this point in the Agenda a discussion of other proposals for a universally recognised ministry, if any such proposals reach the Secretariat before August 1, 1926.)

Subject V. The Sacraments.

(The material in the hands of the Continuation Committee is not yet sufficiently complete to enable it to frame propositions under this heading. It has therefore remitted the drafting of such propositions to the Subjects Committee. Suggestions from any groups which may consider this Agenda will be welcomed by the Subjects Committee if sent to the Secretariat before August 1, 1926.)

Subject VI. The Unity of Christendom and the Place of Different Churches within it.

Propositions.

A. The unity of a body, as St. Paul teaches, implies the diversity, not the uniformity, of its parts, and therefore Christ's Church which is His body should never impose uniformity upon its parts, but should guard their diversity within its unity.

B. As the Church carries the saving truths of the Gospel to all lands in all times, and thus deserves more and more its ancient appellation, Catholic, it has the more need to provide for the diversity of its parts, remaining all the while true to the eternal Gospel which it has received from Jesus Christ through His Apostles.

C. The unity of the Church finds a natural expression in local unity of administration and organisation: whereas its divisions are most apparent where they result in local rivalries; and, in this respect, the utmost endeavours should be used to restore in the Church of our days the conditions of the days of the Apostles, when the only churches were local parts of the one Church, and it was obvious to all men that in one place there was only one Church.

D. Although certain societies having a strong concern for special parts of Christian truth or practice have under the stress of historical circumstances deemed it necessary to organise themselves as churches, and have rendered great services to the universal Church, yet in the future it should be possible for such societies to remain within the unity of the Church, making their special gifts available to the profit of the whole body.

E. It is desirable to postpone to a future meeting the questions, what organ of central authority is proper, right and advantageous for the whole of Christendom, if in God's good providence it is to regain a visible unity, and what should be the functions of the central authority.

Subject VII. Arrangements for Continuing the Work of the Conference.

Before adjourning it will lie with the Conference to make the following arrangements:

(1) Arrangements for future meetings.

Resolution.

The Conference proposes, if the Churches concur, to meet again on one or more occasions until it has considered all those cardinal points on which agreement is necessary before corporate union can be attempted.

(2) Arrangements for special committees for investigation and report (if any).

(3) Arrangements for local propaganda and information about the movement.

Note. In the opinion of the Continuation Committee the Conference would possibly decide to adjourn before completing the Agenda, *e.g.*, after Subject III or IV, and if so, would take VII before separating.

SPECIAL STANDING ORDERS AS TO PROCEDURE IN THE CONFERENCE OF 1927

Prepared and adopted by the Continuation Committee, August 18, 1925.

(*Note.* General Standing Orders will be issued at the time of the Conference.)

1. Method of Discussion.

(*a*) The discussion of each subject shall at the first stage relate immediately to the proposition which is printed in the Agenda.

(*b*) When in the opinion of the Chairman the proposition has been sufficiently discussed, it shall be open to the Conference to discuss the subject more generally and without strict reference to the proposition.

(*c*) When the discussion of a subject is closed, the subject may be referred by the Conference to a drafting committee with instructions to draw up a statement to represent the mind of the Conference.

(*d*) When such a statement has been prepared, it shall be brought before the Conference. If alterations in the statement are proposed, the Conference may refer them to the drafting committee for consideration and report.

(*e*) No statement shall be declared to be adopted unless it be accepted either unanimously or *nemine contradicente*. In case a statement does not gain this measure of acceptance, the Conference shall determine what further steps if any shall be taken on that subject.

2. Subjects not on the Agenda.

Subjects not on the Agenda may be placed there at any stage at the written request of not fewer than three members with the consent of the Arrangements Committee and with the consent of a two-thirds majority of the Conference.

PRAYERS FOR THE PEACE AND UNITY OF THE CHURCH

O LORD Jesus Christ, Who saidst unto Thine Apostles, Peace, I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; Regard not our sins, but the faith of Thy Church, and grant her that peace and unity which is agreeable to Thy will, Who livest and reignest God for ever and ever. Amen.

O GOD of Peace, Who through Thy Son Jesus Christ didst set forth One Faith for the salvation of mankind; Send Thy grace and heavenly blessing upon all Christian people who are striving to draw nearer to Thee, and to each other, in the Unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace. Give us penitence for our divisions, wisdom to know Thy truth, courage to do Thy will, love which shall break down the barriers of pride and prejudice, and an unswerving loyalty to Thy Holy Name. Suffer us not to shrink from any endeavour, which is in accordance with Thy will, for the peace and unity of Thy

Church. Give us boldness to seek only Thy glory and the advancement of Thy Kingdom. Unite us all in Thee as Thou, O Father, with Thy Son and the Holy Spirit, art One God, world without end. Amen.

O LORD Jesus Christ, look with pity, we beseech Thee, upon Thy Church weakened and hindered by differences and divisions; bless the effort to bring together in conference all who confess the faith of Thy Holy Name, Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost, God, for ever and ever. Amen.

Reports of local groups or other agencies who discuss this Agenda and its propositions, together with any other propositions framed upon the subjects of the Agenda, should be addressed to the Secretariat, P. O. Box 226, Boston, Mass., U. S. A., for transmission to the Subjects Committee. Such communications should be received by the Secretariat not later than August 1, 1926.